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Refugee Reports

A News Service of the U.S. Committee for Refugees
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SALVADORAN REFUGEES GOING HOME

Impeded by one protracted impasse after another, a convoy taking home Salvadoran refugees from the Mesa Grande camp in Honduras traveled in fits and starts. Finally, however, on August 14, the 35 buses and 115 trucks crossed the border into El Salvador, ending eight years of exile for 1,230 refugees.

Despite the frayed nerves of many participants in the repatriation, the refugees arrived safely and are now beginning to reconstruct their lives in their homeland.

Still, fears for their security persist. Within days of the repatriation, major American newspapers were documenting the resurgence of death squad activities in El Salvador and the prospects for an end to the civil war seemed remote.

The repatriation was timed to coincide with the first anniversary of the Arias Peace Plan, and follows the successful repatriation of more than 4,000 refugees from Mesa Grande last October (see Refugee Reports, Vol. VIII, No. 10). Prior to this mass organized repatriation, more than 400 refugees from Mesa Grande had individually repatriated this year, along with more than 100 from the Colomoncagua camp closer to the Salvadoran border.

Although Salvadorans are leaving the Honduran refugee camps, there is little indication that migration out of El Salvador has abated this year. In fact, a classified cable from the U.S. embassy in San Salvador in December 1987 reported that "illegal immigration to the United States is increasing" and has "risen back to 1984-86 levels," according to the New York Times.

Conditions in the Honduran refugee camps have been growing increasingly violent and tense in recent months, with three refugees attacked within the camps by Honduran soldiers in the past three months, resulting in two fatalities (see Refugee Reports, Vol. IX, Nos. 5 and 8).

Violence involving Honduran soldiers has also exacerbated tensions in and among the refugees and the agencies working on their behalf in the camps. Hunger strikes in June in Mesa Grande and Colomoncagua protested lack of protection and poor living conditions.

In June the International Council of Voluntary

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Repatriation Bus Stopped at Border. Photo Credit: Going Home

Agencies (ICVA) sent a team to investigate conditions in the camps. (See box, for a summary of its recommendations.) The ICVA report detected strains in relations between voluntary agency staff and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). UNHCR often feels "betrayed" by the voluntary agency staff, the report said, because they are "always seen to take sides with the refugees against it."

"Agency staff, on the other hand," the ICVA report said, "maintain that UNHCR does not always stand up adequately for the refugees vis-a-vis Honduran government pressures."

The refugees also feel these tensions. "As a result of the tense and closed situation in which the refugees live," the report said, "there is a real distrust of UNHCR. Moreover the refugees frequently linked UNHCR to the Honduran military and to the U.S. Embassy, all of which are considered to be hostile to their cause."

A Tense Atmosphere for Return In the highly charged political atmosphere in which the August 14 repatriation took place, accusations of bad faith, manipulation, naivete, stubbornness, and insensitivity were leveled, at one time or another, at nearly every group acting in this drama. These included the governments of Honduras, El Salvador, and the United States, and their military arms; the UNHCR; Salvadoran solidarity groups, such as CRIPDES, the Christian Committee for the Displaced of El Salvador, and CNR, the National Coordinator of Repatriation; private voluntary agencies working in the camps, Caritas, Catholic Relief Services, CEDEN, Medecins sans Frontieres, and the Mennonite Church; international--in this case, American--religious figures accompanying the refugees in a "Going Home" delegation; and the refugees themselves.

In this article, Refugee Reports seeks not to accord credit or blame, but rather to clarify some of the areas of controversy in the hope that this might help to resolve problems that could well present obstacles to safe and successful voluntary repatriation in the future.

Negotiations for Return On July 15, the refugees announced that a group of 2,500 from Mesa Grande would return to El Salvador sometime between August 10 and 20. They demanded that they be permitted to re-

turn as a community to their own places of origin in Teocinte and San Antonio Los Ranchos in the northern Chalatenango Department; to be allowed to bring their animals and possessions; not to be delayed at the border or on the way; to receive documentation; and to be accompanied by the UNHCR, private agencies, and international religious observers.

The initial response of the Salvadoran government, according to members of the Going Home delegation, was negative on all points. The government would only allow a maximum of 500 refugees to return at any one time at 30-to-40 day intervals; to quarantine them upon their arrival; to have them proceed to Hacienda Valle Verde and Seuchitoto (described by Going Home as military garrisons) where they would be questioned; and that only the UNHCR and the Red Cross would be allowed to accompany them across the border.

Every point was a matter of contention between the refugee leadership and representatives of the Salvadoran government, according to Going Home, with Salvadoran church figures and the UNHCR playing a mediating role.

According to Patricia Weiss-Fagen, spokesperson for the UNHCR in Washington, D.C., the general framework of the repatriation had been established prior to the first Mesa Grande return last October through tripartite negotiations involving the governments of El Salvador and Honduras, and UNHCR. She said that the contentious issues regarding the second repatriation were resolved in discussions with the Salvadoran government within the framework of the earlier agreement.

By the time the convoy was ready to leave Mesa Grande, she said, the Salvadoran government had agreed to almost all of the refugees' demands. This included agreement to allow refugees to return to their places of origin; to complete documentation of returning refugees as soon as possible; not to stop refugees at the border; to assist in health and education; and to allow the churches to provide material and spiritual assistance.

Salvadoran Government Fears Publicity, Says Repatriation Must Be "Nonpolitical" The major sticking point, from the point of view of the Salvadoran government, was to avoid a high-profile, political demonstration of support for the refugees. In particular, the government representatives objected to the presence of the American religious delegation accompanying the refugees, and also to another convoy carrying relief items and relatives and supporters coming from San Salvador to greet the refugees upon their return. That convoy had been blocked at the Colima River, in the interior between San Salvador and the border.

General Adolfo Blandon, chairman of the Salvadoran Joint Chiefs of Staff, told Channel Twelve television in San Salvador, "We will not allow foreigners to freely come into our territory and do what they please." He said that "a great quantity of vehicles" from San Salvador were carrying members of the National Union of Salvadoran Workers (UNTS), and said that it was blocked at Colima "because the roads toward Teosinte and Guarjila are very narrow and a traffic snarl could have resulted."

Among those in the second convoy stopped at the Colima bridge inside El Salvador was Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton, auxiliary bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Detroit, Michigan. He told Refugee Reports that the army was very intimidating. Harassment of the convoy included setting off sirens and what appeared to be taped sounds of machine-gun fire during the night or during celebrations of mass. Loudspeakers would threaten the Salvadoran leaders of the convoy by name.

"A huge armored personnel carrier with a long-barrelled gun mounted on top was right in front of us," said Gumbleton. "Periodically it would stop and point the gun directly at people, mostly the leaders. The gun was also pointed directly at me for a time. It makes you feel very vulnerable."

Gumbleton said that he believed that the presence of international observers and the media was essential for the safety of the refugees. "I've seen what the military does to these people," he said. "It is no exaggeration to say that they would not be opposed to wiping out whole villages of people as long as they thought the world wouldn't know about it."

The Mesa Grande Convoy Moves Slowly The convoy from Mesa Grande got started early Saturday morning, August 13. Nevertheless,

a series of problems caused delays. Among them were last-minute controversies over items from the camp that the refugees wanted to take with them and the amount of money being given to the refugees in repatriation grants.

A pamphlet circulated by the refugees after they left the camp which castigated one of the voluntary agencies caused that agency's workers to threaten to pull out, resulting in further delays.

Stand-Off at Border Over American Religious Delegation According to the UNHCR, agreement had been made in ad-hoc negotiations before the buses left Mesa Grande that the Going Home delegation would travel by bus only as far as the border, whereupon they would disembark and stay behind in Honduras. However, at the refugees' insistence, the Going Home people stayed on board after the buses reached the frontier.

Members of the Going Home delegation said that no prior agreements were made to disembark at the border. "I was there when the negotiations were being made," said Dr. Katherine Herrera, assistant director of the Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN) in Washington, D.C., who was acting as press secretary for the Going Home delegation. "The refugees told UNHCR, 'We want you to come,' but also said, 'We want the internationals to come too.'"

The convoy was stopped at the border for 30 hours, stalemated on the question whether the 15-person Going Home delegation would be permitted to accompany the refugees across the border. During this time, some of the refugees' chickens began to die, food and water started to run out, and the discussions concerning Going Home grew increasingly heated.

"At the border, we were standing there looking down the barrels of guns," said Herrera. "The soldiers were pointing their guns at us, not at the ground. There were also U.S. military advisors present and military helicopters flying low with their side doors open. The tension was very high."

The UNHCR, however, said that the Salvadoran armed forces maintained discipline and acted in a positiye manner, despite the evident tensions.

The government was adamant that the Americans not be allowed to enter. At the time, Interior Minister Edgar Belloso Funes told a Washington Post reporter that the decision was made at the highest levels of the Salvadoran armed forces and government.

The Interior Minister said, "The refugees are being exploited by the foreigners, and experience has shown us that these internationalists break the country's laws, participate in demonstrations, and we will not allow them in."

Finally, three church leaders from El Salvador, a Catholic, Lutheran, and Episcopalian, agreed to accompany the refugees to their ultimate destinations.

UNHCR said that the Salvadoran church leaders forcibly remonstrated with the 15 from Going Home, pleading with them to leave the bus immediately.

Herrera said that inside the bus "the refugees were incredibly flexible and patient. 'If our bishops come with us,' they said, 'you can leave.'"

"At no point did we intervene," said Herrera. "We were responsible to the refugees themselves who had bluntly told us in all seriousness that they needed us to save their lives. We would not leave until they told us to get off the bus."

But the controversy left feelings of frustration and anger.

"Although they were well-intentioned, the effect of Going Home's actions were counterproductive," said Weiss-Fagen. "Had it not been for their presence, the refugees would probably have returned safely on August 13."

Weiss-Fagen said, "A big political spectacle was enacted after all remaining issues had been resolved and the refugees were not in any danger."

Does Publicity Help Or Hinder Safe Repatriation? The differences among the groups assisting the refugees hinge on the question of whether publicity works to the benefit or detriment of repatriating refugees.

Clearly the presence of international media and of the Going Home delegates contributed to the delays that held up the actual repatriation. Their presence not only drew rhetorical fire from the Salvadoran government, but also apparently drew the contempt of some of the international agencies experienced in conducting refugee repatriations worldwide.

On August 14, the UN High Commissioner, Jean-Pierre Hocke, issued a communique from

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF VOLUNTARY AGENCIES (ICVA)
MISSION TO HONDURAS
SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Honduran Authorities

° Within its own borders, Honduras should cease the harassment of refugees by its military forces and especially by the "Fuerzas Territoriales", seen to have been responsible for the killing and wounding of Salvadorans in the camps. In this respect, a first step would be the abolition of military patrols within the present boundaries of the camps.

° The Honduran Government should see the refugee camps primarily as a humanitarian instead of a national security issue...Honduran military pressure on the camps has worked against the Government's own aim of eventual repatriation of Salvadoran refugees.

° The mission opposes any efforts to relocate Salvadoran refugee camps to other sites within Honduras against the wishes of the refugees.... As the events of October 1987 in Mesa Grande show, repatriation in accord with the will of the refugees offers a better alternative.

To UNHCR

° The mission strongly feels that the refugees' request for a 24-hour UNHCR presence should be recognized and other protection measures reinforced.

° The mission believes that a stronger emphasis by UNHCR on liaison with and outreach to the individuals working within the voluntary agencies would minimize UNHCR's feelings of isolation--and indeed alienation--from these agencies.

° The mission recognizes and fully supports UNHCR's responsibility for repatriating individual refugees upon their request. However, UNHCR should be sensitive to the feelings of the refugee community in the manner it carries out this responsibility. The mission urges in particular that the practice of repatriating refugees during the night be limited as much as possible.

° UNHCR should be vigilant in maintaining the integrity and autonomy of its program in Honduras against the often considerable pressures it faces from donor governments.

° The closed environment in which the refugees live frequently results in criticism from them of UNHCR and its work, sometimes in excessive language. The mission suggests that UNHCR manifest a more patient understanding of the refugees' frustrations.

To the Voluntary Agencies

° While the mission believes that most agency personnel are well-qualified and well-trained, there have been instances when this was not true. The mission therefore recommends that the agencies be particularly prudent in their selection and training of personnel.

° Agency workers underlined...their desire for close and friendly collaboration with UNHCR and for an end to the occasional personal and operational frictions that have occurred.... In this respect, the mission particularly recommends a) that newly arrived agency workers make themselves known at the earliest opportunity to UNHCR representatives in the field, b) that agency workers not engage in public denunciation of UNHCR through advertisements in the press, c) that agency personnel reinforce their efforts to promote refugees' understanding of UNHCR and to strengthen collaboration among refugees, UNHCR, and agencies.

To the Refugees

° The mission acknowledges the strength of refugee community organization and the vital role that unity, even militancy, have played in the defense of refugee interests. The mission recommends that there be no recourse to unjustified attacks on UNHCR, and that the refugees recognize the advantages of dialogue and cooperation.

° The mission well understands the need for solidarity of action within the refugee community. At the same time, it fully supports the right of individuals to repatriate to El Salvador whenever they so desire. The mission recommends that the refugee community, which has also recognized the right of voluntary repatriation, be attentive to safeguarding it at all times.

° Given that the mobilization of international solidarity depends largely upon precise information, the mission asks that the refugee community be particularly attentive to the accuracy of the reporting of events.

The ICVA mission expresses its appreciation for the help received from UNHCR, the voluntary agencies, and the refugees. The refugees are condemned by war and their conditions of asylum to a life of confinement and harassment which they endure with considerable fortitude. Those in UNHCR and the voluntary agencies who protect and attend them do so with an abnegation which is worthy of the highest praise.

Geneva expressing regret that "a number of incidents are taking place" leading to the belief that "there is a serious risk of deviation from what should be a strictly humanitarian operation." He urged that the repatriation be carried out "in a strictly humanitarian and apolitical spirit."

The continuing politicization of the repatriation was demonstrated when 60 international delegates took out an ad in the August 16 El Mundo demanding not only free passage of food and relatives to the refugees and respect for their decision to choose to return to their places of origin, but also "the expulsion of U.S. government advisors, who are the ones who are really intervening in the internal affairs of El Salvador."

On August 17, the Salvadoran Foreign Ministry issued a communique saying that it "condemns and regrets that the return of Salvadoran refugees is being hindered and exploited by subversive groups for negative purposes far removed from any humanitarian considerations."

Herrera said, however, that the media attention and presence of international observers was essential to safeguard the return. "We drew the heat, allowing the refugees to enter without harassment by the army."

She said, "Look what the government wanted to do. They wanted to quarantine the refugees, to question them in the army garrison. Those became nonissues with international accompaniment. If we had not been there, had there been no press, can you imagine what would have happened?"

Weiss-Fagen said, "All those issues--if they had even been issues, and not rumors--were resolved before international accompaniment ever got there. The internationals were not instrumental in those issues in the least."

Why Go Home? Why Now? What further complicates the issue for returning Salvadorans is that they are voluntarily repatriating to an unresolved and dangerous situation in their homeland. The local military commanders in the department to which they have returned look upon them with utmost suspicion. "These people have had political indoctrination for eight years from the guerrillas in the [refugee] camps," said Col. Ciro Lopez Roque, military commander of Chalatenango. He told the Washington Post, "Maybe not all of them are masas [civilian supporters of the guerrillas], but they sympathize with the terrorists. Their return is an advantage for the subversives."

Last year, following the first mass repatriation from Mesa Grande, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) told UNHCR that "peaceful conditions do not prevail in the places of origin of the refugees...and their safety cannot be guaranteed," and warned against "misunderstandings regarding the actual conditions of life in their homelands" that could lead to "unfounded expectations and hopes by the refugees."

According to Bishop Gumbleton, the refugees are fully aware of the dangers they face. "One of the woman leaders of the caravan described her arrest to me, her severe dehumanization and totally degrading treatment. But she said that she was determined to bring about change, to correct injustice."

"Not all of the refugees have the courage to go home now," said Eileen Purcell, executive director of the Salvadoran Humanitarian Aid, Research, and Education (SHARE) Foundation, a nonprofit organization providing assistance for Salvadoran refugee repatriation and reconstruction. "But those who are willing to take this risk are charting new ground with prophetic dignity and courage."

Jose Escobar, executive director of the Interfaith Office on Accompaniment, who was a member of the Going Home delegation, added, "They think that by going back they will prevent the right wing in El Salvador from consolidating its hold on the government and prevent them from implementing total war in the countryside."

But what of the children? More than half of the refugees returning from Mesa Grande were children. Are they aware of the dangers?

"These are not like American children," said Herrera. "They are strong. When I first arrived at Mesa Grande, it was the children who described in detail the brutal murder of a Salvadoran refugee inside the camp by Honduran soldiers 22 days before." (See Refugee Reports, Vol. IX, No. 8.)

"There are 8-year-old children who have never seen a river or a mango tree," said Escobar. "When the refugees left El Salva-

dor eight years ago they thought it would be for a short time. They never expected that they would be in camps this long."

Repatriates Are Settling In Thomas Quigley, advisor on Latin American affairs for the U.S. Catholic Conference's overseas Justice and Peace division returned on September 1 from visiting the recently arrived returnees in San Antonio los Ranchos. He told Refugee Reports that the refugees are well provided for and have already begun clearing the fields.

Quigley described the town as having been completely abandoned and showing widespread war destruction. The church had clearly been bombed. Hardly a building was left intact. But, even in this inhospitable environment, he recalled a face-to-face encounter with one of the newly arrived refugees. Standing in the mud after three days of heavy rains, and, with the rain still coming down on him, the former refugee just kept saying how happy he was to be home.

Quigley saw a hopeful sign of how destruction can be transformed about one mile away, where the town of Guarjila, populated by refugees who returned from Mesa Grande in last October's repatriation, is blossoming. "It looks like a picture postcard village, placid and prosperous," he said. "The corn was high. The houses were simple, but orderly and spacious."

"I would expect that in eight to ten months San Antonio los Ranchos will look like Guarjila," predicted Quigley, a view that bodes well for their future.

Effect on Salvadorans in the United States The August 14 repatriation is being closely watched in the United States, in part, because of the effect some observers believe it could have on the deportation of Salvadorans from the United States.

During last year's congressional debate on a bill that would temporarily suspend deportations of Salvadorans and Nicaraguans--the Moakley/DeConcini bill--Rep. Hamilton Fish, Jr. (R-N.Y.) cited the demand of refugees in Mesa Grande to repatriate as an argument against suspending deportation. He added, "Most areas in El Salvador are not unsafe and Honduras provides safe refugee camps to all Salvadorans seeking haven" (see Refugee Reports, Vol. VIII, No. 8).

Escobar said, however, "You can't compare conditions in a refugee camp in Honduras with the United States."

Weiss-Fagen added that UNHCR does not take the position that just because some people voluntarily decide to repatriate that others should be compelled to do so.

Escobar observed, "The refugees in Mesa Grande are a community. When they organize a repatriation, they act together and with the solidarity of international and Salvadoran support groups."

"But," he said, "the individual who is deported arrives at the airport in San Salvador naked and alone."

Update

▪ Vietnam has agreed to accommodate the voluntary repatriation of 10,000 Vietnamese boat people now in Malaysian refugee camps, according to an August 30 story in The Washington Post. The announcement was made in a joint statement released by the Malaysian and Vietnamese governments following four-day talks in Vietnam. The Post reported that Malaysia "also said it would consider providing assistance to Vietnam for the repatriation, reclassifying refugees as illegal immigrants, and closing its main refugee camp," Pulau Bidong.

▪ House and Senate Appropriations Committee conferees, meeting in early August, agreed on a figure of $382.3 million for the Office of Refugee Resettlement's (ORR) FY 89 budget. The appropriations bill (H.R. 6998) now faces floor votes in both houses of Congress. If the bill passes, ORR will be presented with an increase of about $36 million from last year's budget.

ORR Proposed FY 89 Budget
Senate/House Conference

Cash/Medical Assistance	
State Administration	$261,820,000
Social Services	64,906,000
Targeted Assistance	34,052,000
Preventive Health	5,770,000
Matching Grant Program	15,808,000
TOTAL	$382,356,000

° On August 24, ORR published an announcement in the Federal Register (Vol. 53, No. 164) that reduces the period of eligibility for refugee cash assistance (RCA) and refugee medical assistance (RMA) from 18 months to 12 months. The rule, which was first proposed last October, is expected to save an estimated $14 million in FY 89.

Recent Developments

CONDITIONS WORSEN FOR REFUGEES IN HONG KONG AS VIETNAMESE ARRIVALS CONTINUE

They have been housed in abandoned factories, army barracks, airplane hangars, and on ferries moored in Hong Kong harbor. One new camp is being built and another even larger one has been proposed. And still the refugees keep coming. Since January, over 15,000 Vietnamese have arrived in Hong Kong seeking temporary asylum and eventual resettlement in a third country, nearly an eightfold increase from the same period last year. The refugee population in Hong Kong now stands at 25,059.

In an effort to stem the outflow, the Hong Kong government announced that, as of June 16, all new arrivals are to be considered illegal immigrants, subject to detention and repatriation. Only those who can prove their refugee status to the satisfaction of a Hong Kong immigration official will be allowed to seek resettlement elsewhere.

Despite the new policies, the Vietnamese influx shows little sign of slowing down. From mid-June to the end of August, 9,125 Vietnamese have arrived in Hong Kong, according to a government spokesman. And as debate intensifies on the pros and cons of screening, resettlement, and repatriation, relief workers and refugee program officials in Hong Kong say that the most immediate problem is the crowded and unhealthy living conditions in many of the camps.

Thousands Living in a Converted Factory

In order to make room for new arrivals, the Hong Kong government has moved the pre-June 16 inhabitants of Chi Ma Wan and Hei Ling Chau camps to an 11-story factory building. As of August 17, there were 4,013 people in the San Yick factory, according to a U.S. refugee official in Hong Kong. In a recent visit to the factory, the official found the refugees living in "overcrowded and unsanitary conditions. The building smells of human waste," he said in an unclassified cable, "and there is no escape from the noise of 650 people crowded together on each floor. Refugees are living on triple bunks, with the top bunk 3 feet from the ceiling."

A water shortage in the factory means that refugees cannot bathe or wash clothes, and toilets and showers do not work properly, according to the official. "More chronic problems," he said, "are the lack of fresh air and the fact that the refugees have absolutely no access to the outside. The building has poor ventilation and, although there are many fans, the air is stale even on the empty floors... With the lack of fresh air, there have already been numerous people complaining of headaches, dizziness and nausea."

The Hong Kong government tried to get use of an adjacent empty lot as an exercise area, the official said, but the company that owned the space refused, citing plans to construct a building there.

A clinic, kitchen, and classrooms are planned for the refugee facility, but will not be completed until some time in September, according to the official. "Very limited schooling" for younger children is being provided by a local voluntary agency, International Social Services, he said.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has offered to build and administer a new refugee facility in Tuen Mun, which would house many of the 16,000 Vietnamese who arrived in Hong Kong before June 16. Most of these refugees have been living in "closed camps," where they have been denied the opportunity to work or travel outside the camp. About 2,600 Vietnamese who arrived in Hong Kong before June 1982 are living in what is currently the only open camp facility, Kai Tak.

Conditions are likely to improve considerably in the new UNHCR facility, Hong Kong sources say. The Tuen Mun camp is expected to have family-oriented accommodations--the closed camps were prison-like barracks--and residents will be free to take outside work while they wait for a chance at resettlement.

The Hong Kong government, meanwhile,

has plans to build a new detention center in Whitehead that may hold up to 4,800 people by late December.

"In effect, they want to move the closed camp people into open camps," a U.S. refugee official told Refugee Reports. "The closed camps, in turn, are now detention centers. The government is trying frantically to house everyone. The problem is that everything is full."

Screening Begins, No Results Announced As of the end of August, Hong Kong immigration officers had interviewed more than 1,000 Vietnamese, but "no decision on any individual has been made," according to Peter Randall, chief information officer for the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in New York. In a letter to Refugee Reports, Randall outlined Hong Kong's new procedures for Vietnamese arrivals since June 16.

1. New arrivals are met by marine police in the harbor; they are informed of the change in policy. They can reprovision their boat and sail on (only one boat has done so since June) or agree to be placed in a detention center.

2. Those who choose to land are taken to Green Island for initial registration, then transferred to a detention center. The four major detention centers are Chi Ma Wan, Hei Ling Chau, Argyle IV, and Erskine (see chart).

3. Screening is carried out by an immigration officer assisted by an interpreter. Several interviews make take place if an applicant's background is complex.

4. The initial decision on status, refugee or illegal immigrant, is made by the immigration officer who conducted the interview. This is passed on to a senior immigration official, then up to a director who makes the final decision. Applicants have the right to appeal a decision to the Governor-in-Council.

5. Approved applicants gain refugee status and will be moved to an open camp to await interviewing for resettlement. Rejected applicants retain their illegal immigrant

VIETNAMESE BOAT PEOPLE IN HONG KONG
POPULATION AND LOCATION AS OF 8/26/88

Center	Capacity	Category of Vietnamese Boat People							Total
		Arrived before 2-7-82	Arrived After 2-7-82 and before 16-6-88		Arrived on or after 16-6-88				
		VR	VR	ECVII	Pending Determination	ECVII	VR	VII	
Open Center									
Kai Tak Transit Center	2,600	2,608	--	--	--	--	--	--	2,608
Government Centers									
Sham Shui Po	4,500	1	5,149	--	--	--	--	--	5,150
San Yick	4,200	10	4,018	--	--	--	--	--	4,028
Tuen Mun	2,200	7	3,072	--	--	--	--	--	3,079
Argyle IV	1,300	--	5	--	1,310	--	--	--	1,315
ASRC	500	1	286	139	--	12	--	--	438
Cape Collinson	600	--	614	--	--	--	--	--	614
Victoria	--	--	43	122	--	19	--	--	184
Chi Ma Wan	2,640	--	--	--	2,629	--	--	--	2,629
Hei Ling Chau	2,880	--	--	--	2,804	--	--	--	2,804
Lai Chi Kok	--	--	1	--	78	--	--	--	79
Arrival Reception Centers									
Green Island	900	--	--	--	902	9	--	--	911
Erskine	1,200	--	--	--	1,220	--	--	--	1,220
TOTAL	23,520	2,627	13,188	261	8,943	40	--	--	25,059

Key to Abbreviations:

VR -- Vietnamese Refugee
VII -- Vietnamese Illegal Immigrant
ECVII -- Ex-China Vietnamese Illegal Immigrant
ASRC -- Argyle Street Reception Center

Source: Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office, New York

classification and remain in detention centers, pending repatriation.

Government reports state that "the UNHCR is free to observe the screening process in action and participate in any appeals against refusal to grant refugee status that may arise," but UNHCR has not yet done so. "We are still in discussions with the government," said Fazlul Karim, head of the UNHCR mission in Hong Kong. There have been differences in perception, but I don't want to go into detail. We have to get to an agreed position on the rules of the game, the sooner the better, because the interviews are going on."

The interview format and content have not been released by the Hong Kong government, but one local news account said that it comprised seven pages of questions.

Refugee advocates in the United States and Hong Kong have been critical of the new screening policy. Arthur Helton of the New York-based Lawyers Committee for Human Rights denounced the policy as "brutal" and "deterrence in the most insidious form--the mistreatment of asylum seekers in order to discourage others from coming."

"Screening will not lead to a status," said Helton in a letter to the New York Times, "since those accepted as refugees will continue to be held in camps, and those rejected will be indefinitely imprisoned under harsh conditions."

A letter in a Hong Kong newspaper signed by a local group of social workers, teachers, and businesspersons said, "Detention without trial or arbitrary detention is a direct violation of the Habeas Corpus Act 1679... If the government is violating this act, and if the community tolerates this violation, we are saying goodbye to British justice in Hong Kong."

Hong Kong government reports have defended the new policy, saying that it is "in accordance with internationally accepted practice for the determination of refugee status."

Repatriation Talks Inch Forward as Refugees Protest Perhaps the most controversial aspect of Hong Kong's new screening measures is the threat they carry of repatriation. On August 3, the day Hong Kong officials began repatriation talks in Hanoi, about 2,700 Vietnamese new arrivals in Hei Ling Chau went on a two-day hunger strike in protest. A few weeks earlier, about 700 people had staged a hunger strike, during which clothes and furniture were burned, 11 people were injured, and 100 arrested.

Sources report that occasional "incidents,"--usually brief, angry confrontations between boat people and officers from the Correctional Services Department--are still occurring in Hei Ling Chau and may be a factor in the government's postponement of screening decisions.

Following two days of talks in Hanoi, the governments of Hong Kong and Vietnam released a joint statement saying that "realistic and effective measures" were "urgently needed" to end refugee outflows. They agreed to meet again soon to consider "the terms and conditions under which a repatriation on a humanitarian basis might take place."

Randall confirmed reports that five Vietnamese voluntarily returned home on August 12 and said another 96 people have asked to go back.

Resettlement Only Available to Few Even as arrival rates skyrocket in Hong Kong, overseas resettlement offers continue to dwindle. In 1980, more than 37,000 Vietnamese were resettled from Hong Kong. Last year, only 2,212 were accepted. In the first eight months of 1988, resettlement offers have been extended to 1,768 boat people. More than 3,500 people have been in camps for at least three years, and 900 for more than seven.

Part of the slowdown, at least for the United States, is due to the fact that an increasing percentage of arrivals come from northern Vietnam, and lack overseas ties. Northerners comprise about 70 percent of outflow, a U.S. refugee official told Refugee Reports. Of these, only about 15 percent have even distant relatives in the United States. "I think we take about 1 percent of the northerners in Hong Kong," he said, "and about half of all the southerners."

"I don't foresee large numbers of people being resettled out of here," the official said. "The United States has its criteria, and there is not an unlimited number of eligible people here." Since 1982, the United States has imposed a virtual moratorium on admissions of refugees

in the P-6 processing category, those without previous U.S. ties.

"I see Hong Kong being stuck with the lion's share of the people here," the official continued. "They have got to get them out of the camps and integrated into their society because they are going to be here."

At least one member of Hong Kong's Legislative Council thinks resettlement numbers will increase, if arrival rates diminish. "I expect the resettlement countries will start accepting more," said Hui Yin-fat in a Newsweek interview. "Once the screening becomes effective and the numbers become smaller, they will be willing to open up." But he acknowledged that there may be people left behind. "Eventually those people who are not resettled and who don't want to return to Vietnam will be accepted by Hong Kong," even though, he said, "this is not a popular solution," either for Hong Kong or the refugees.

Reader Exchange

° Educational materials concerning refugees and immigrants will be disseminated by the COMSIS corporation of Wheaton, Maryland, which is taking over the functions of the Refugee Materials Center in Kansas City, Missouri (see Refugee Reports, Vol. VIII, No. 9). Under a contract with the Department of Education, COMSIS will incorporate some of the former RMC functions into the activities of the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (NCBE).

To order a catalogue with titles, descriptions, and prices contact NCBE/Refugee and Immigrant Education, 11501 Georgia Avenue, Suite 102, Wheaton, MD 20902. (800) 647-0123, or in the local calling area, (301) 933-9448.

° Florida Rural Legal Services (FRLC) has recently obtained from the Immigration and Naturalization Service the last known U.S. and foreign addresses and dates of departure of all persons in their local INS district who were deported, removed, or excluded from the United States since August 1, 1985. They are now attempting to contact those persons to inform them that they might be eligible as Special Agricultural Workers (SAW) under the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA).

FRLC is urging other refugee and immigrant assistance organizations to submit Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to the INS for comparable information in their districts. "Those of you who work with specific nationalities, such as Haitians or Central Americans, could limit your FOIA requests to those people with whom you work," said Mike Guare of FRLS.

Those who would like more information about submitting FOIA requests to the INS on this matter should contact Mike Guare, FRLS, 305 N. Jackson Ave., P.O. Drawer 1499, Bartow, FL 33830. (800) 282-7680 or (813) 534-1781.

° The Refugee Policy Group has an opening for a full-time research analyst position. They are looking for someone with experience in international and/or domestic health care with language ability in French, Spanish, or Portuguese to participate in several projects relating to refugee health care policy.

For further information, contact Lance Clark or Elzbieta Gozdziak at the Refugee Policy Group, 1424 16th St., NW, Suite 401, Washington, DC 20036. (202) 387-3015.

° A new mutual assistance association has been formed to assist refugees and other migrants from Zaire. The organization, MSAADA, meaning solidarity, is largely focused on the needs of refugees and displaced Zaireans abroad, particularly in Uganda. However, it also seeks to assist Zaireans in the United States with administrative and adjustment problems. For more information, please contact S. Manyalonge, MSAADA Association, P.O. Box 2017, New York, NY 10185.

Resources

SALVADORAN MIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES ANALYZED

About one million Salvadorans are estimated to reside in the United States, most of whom traveled north to escape political conditions in their home country, according to a recently released report by the Hemispheric

Migration Project of Georgetown University's Center for Immigration Policy and Refugee Assistance (CIPRA).

"So long as the war continues," say authors Segundo Montes Mozo and Juan Jose Garcia Vasquez, "for many Salvadorans U.S.-bound emigration will remain their only escape from grinding poverty and peril, and the only means by which they can support the same families that they must often leave in the process."

The study, based on extrapolations from surveys of 1,308 families in El Salvador and 1,336 Salvadoran emigrants in the United States, estimates that each Salvadoran emigrant, on average, sends home about $113 per month, which would amount to a total in excess of $1.3 billion per year, if the estimates of Salvadoran residents in the United States are correct.

The study finds that Salvadoran emigrants to the United States are better educated and hold better jobs than the population at large in El Salvador. "When the average emigrant departs," says the study, "the country loses a young worker in the prime of life who has an education superior to that of most of his or her fellow citizens."

Although aware of the tangible benefits that this money brings to those faced with El Salvador's faltering economy, the authors warn that "the vaunted initiative of the Salvadoran people can wither as families come to depend on the support of relatives overseas." Remittances from Salvadorans in the United States represent an average of 61 percent of the income for their families in El Salvador.

The survey also shows that emigration is increasing among El Salvador's displaced population (see table, page 16). However, the report notes that most displaced persons are too poor to undertake the trip north.

The survey of Salvadorans in the United States reveals that only 22 percent enjoy legal status, although another 21 percent have initiated the process of legalization. Of those who arrived after 1981--which represents 66 percent of the displaced and 45.5 percent of the nondisplaced --only 10 percent enjoy legal status, and fewer than one-fifth are attempting to adjust their status.

Salvadoran Migration to the United States: An Exploratory Study is available for $7.50, plus $1 for postage and handling, from CIPRA, Box 2298, Hoya Station, Washington, DC 20057. (202) 687-7032. Make checks payable to Georgetown University.

STUDY LOOKS AT CENTRAL AMERICANS IN THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICO

A new study of Central Americans in the United States and Mexico recommends treating their mass entry as a humanitarian emergency, and "not as a challenge to immigration enforcement or a pawn of foreign policy gamesmanship."

Central Americans in Mexico and the United States: Unilateral, Bilateral, and Regional Perspectives, by Sergio Aguayo and Patricia Weiss-Fagen, says that it is essential that both Mexico and the United States incorporate safe haven measures to protect Central Americans from deportation.

The authors fault both governments for inconsistencies in their treatment of Central Americans, finding that many decisions of major importance are relegated to low-level officials, often associated with immigration enforcement.

Aguayo and Weiss-Fagen note that the Cartegena Declaration of November 1984, signed by the governments of the region (with the notable exception of the United States) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), establishes a more lenient definition of "refugee" than the "well-founded fear of persecution" definition found in the 1951 Convention (and the U.S. Refugee Act). Cartegena, in contrast, includes as refugees people who have fled their countries due to "generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violations of human rights, or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed the public order."

"Using this definition," the authors argue, "many of the Central Americans in Mexico and the United States could be considered refugees."

The authors are cognizant of the political obstacles to granting Central Americans safe haven. "To be sure," they write, "permitting access to legal status, even

temporary status, to all or a major sector of the Central Americans now in exile, increases the likelihood that more might remain even in the event of a relatively successful peace proces."

Aguayo and Weiss-Fagen caution, however, against overstating the "magnet effect" such legislation could have on Central Americans. By the same token, they warn that most deterrents are unlikely to make much of a difference. "It is not at all clear," say the authors, "that difficulty in obtaining status or even jobs is an effective deterrent for people fleeing insecurity and physical danger as well as economic crisis."

Central Americans in Mexico and the United States, published by the Hemispheric Migration Project of Georgetown University's Center for Immigration Policy and Refugee Assistance (CIPRA), is available for $7.50, plus $1 for postage and handling. Send checks made out to Georgetown University to CIPRA, Box 2298, Hoya Station, Washington, DC 20057. (202) 687-7032.

THE VOICES OF MESA GRANDE SING

"Pedimos Paz,"--We ask for Peace--is a collection of songs from the Salvadoran refugees in the Mesa Grande camp in Honduras. Written and performed by the refugees themselves in the Mesa Grande camp, the songs express their culture and their desire to go home.

The themes of the songs are the beauty and love of El Salvador and the longing to return. Despite many of the sad lyrics, the songs are lively and convey an overall sense of hope and determination. In translation, one song says, "We are farmers. We love to work. And to learn of beautiful things. That is why we ask for peace. The most beautiful gift would be to find rest in our homeland. And to sing a song of joy when justice and peace reign. We do not want to be imprisoned like birds in a cage. They can sing and move their wings, but wish to be free and to fly."

One of the songs, "Viva Santa Ana", tells of the war-torn region of El Salvador from which many of the refugees have fled, and to which many returned in the first Mesa Grande repatriation in October 1987 (see Refugee Reports, Vol. XIII, No. 10). It is not a song of despair, however, but of affirmation. "Oh blessed land of Santa Ana, A land so full of happiness, My life and heart go out to you...Viva Santa Ana, Land that tastes of love, Land that smells of cotton....How wonderful to be from Santa Ana...And to sing to the beat of my guitars songs of my country with all my heart."

The cost of the Spanish-language tape from "rich countries" (presumably the United States and Canada) is $10 for individuals, $7 for organizations ordering 20 or more. From other countries, the tape is available for $5 for individuals, $4 for orders of 20 or more. All profits from the sale of the cassette will be distributed to Salvadoran refugees in the three Honduran refugee camps (Mesa Grande, San Antonio, and Colomoncagua) through international agencies operating in the camps.

To order, send checks to De Montreal Au Monde, Inc., C.P. 100, Station Place du Parc, Montreal, Quebec H2W 2N1, Canada.

CARECEN REPORTS ON FIRST SALVADORAN REPATRIATION FROM MESA GRANDE

Earlier this year, the Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN) in Washington, D.C. published a report on the October 10, 1987 repatriation of 4,313 Salvadoran refugees from the Mesa Grande camp in Honduras.

"At Mesa Grande and in displaced communities in El Salvador," said the report, "the Salvadorans affected by the war are a politically knowledgeable community, well aware of the circumstances that have transformed them into refugees and are aware as well of the future prospects and their potential. The Salvadorans at the camp are simply tired of their role as war victims. Accordingly they made a proposal in their own interest, to secure once again the basic rights to which all human beings are entitled. They were not deluded about the conditions to which they would return nor about the dangers that they would face on the way. They simply wanted to go home."

After Seven Years in Honduras... Salvadoran Refugees Return Home includes a detailed account of the repatriation itself,

plus appendices that include a chronology of abuses against repopulated communities and a list of refugee returnees in prison.

The 84-page report is available for $8.50, plus $1.50 for postage and handling, from CARECEN, 3112 Mt. Pleasant St., NW, Washington, DC 20010. (202) 328-9799.

VIDEOS ON ASYLUM, TREATMENT OF TORTURE VICTIMS

The National Practice Institute has announced the availability of two new videos in its Cassette Lecture Series.

"Asylum Representation" gives technical information on representing asylum clients as well as an overview of developments since passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act and the Supreme Court's Cardoza-Fonseca decision. The four-hour video features the 1988 conference of the Minnesota Lawyers International Human Rights Committee.

"Acknowledgement and Treatment of Torture Victims" is a one-hour video featuring highlights from a 1987 conference, sponsored by the Center for Victims of Torture in Minneapolis (see Refugee Reports, Vol. VI, No. 7), which was the first conference on torture treatment held in the United States.

"Asylum Representation" is available in audio for $115 and for $350 in video. The torture treatment audio cassette is available for $35, video for $125. An unedited 8 hour conference version is also available. A shipping cost of $2 per audio item and $15 per video is also required, as is 6.5 percent sales tax for Minnesota residents. Cassettes may be ordered from the National Practice Institute, Continuing Professional Education, 330 Second Ave., South, Suite 770, Minneapolis, MN 55401. (800) 328-4444.

THE RAID

A Spanish-language video, "La Redada" (The Raid) dramatizes an Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) raid on a workplace in order to compare the situation of undocumented aliens who know their legal rights with those who do not.

The 31-minute color video is available in VHS for $24.95, plus $2.50 for shipping from Franciscan Communications, 1229 S. Santee St., Los Angeles, CA 90015. In California, please add 6 percent sales tax. (800) 421-8510 or (213) 746-2916.

KILLING FIELDS IN MOZAMBIQUE

Millions of people have been uprooted from their homes in Mozambique, and thousands more are fleeing each day, as atrocities by RENAMO, the South African-backed guerrilla force continue to mount, according to a recently released report from the U.S. Committee for Refugees.

The situation, as described in the August 1988 update to an earlier issue paper, Refugees from Mozambique: Shattered Land, Fragile Asylum, "is so dire, their brutalization so severe, that it demands the concerted attention of the international humanitarian community."

The USCR report cites problems that Mozambican refugees have encountered in countries of asylum, but notes that these difficulties "pale in comparison to the violence that caused them to flee."

Among other recommendations, the report calls on South Africa to cease its support of RENAMO. It further calls on South Africa to stop repatriating Mozambican refugees and to deactivate its electrified border fence with Mozambique, which has taken the lives of at least dozens of refugees attempting to flee the violent civil war in their homeland.

The 39-page report is available for $2 from USCR, 1025 Vermont Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20005. (202) 347-3507.

VIDEO SHOWS SUDANESE DISPLACED BY WAR

A massive influx of displaced war refugees in the southern Sudan is documented in a

recent videotape from the U.S. Committee for Refugees. The 15-minute video shows the overcrowding and the lack of food and medicine that are putting the lives of up to 85 percent of the population of the southern Sudan at grave risk.

The video is narrated by USCR director Roger Winter, who recently returned from the southern Sudan. "At the time of my visit," he said, "local crops were all dead or dying, there was no food being supplied from outside sources, and the doctor at the local hospital with 500 in-patients was performing amputations and surgery without any medicines or anesthetics."

The color video is available in VHS for $30 from USCR, 1025 Vermont Ave., Suite 920, Washington, DC 20005. (202) 347-3507.

STATE DEPARTMENT RIGHTS REPORT CRITIQUED

The State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1987 show the influence of foreign policy considerations, according to a critique published by Human Rights Watch and the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights in June.

"In countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Turkey, the Philippines, and the People's Republic of China" the report says--countries where the Administration strongly identifies with the government or perceives important U.S. interests to be served by harmonious relations--"the State Department fails adequately to portray human rights violations." Reports on these countries, according to Critique: Review of the Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1987, "suffer from understatement and the glossing over of real abuses."

The report also faults the State Department for distorting the human rights situations in countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua, and Vietnam--countries the Administration perceives as ideological adversaries--"by discounting positive human rights developments and by emphasizing unverified or speculative allegations of abuses."

The 192-page book includes critiques of State Department reports on 44 countries. It can be ordered for $12 from Human Rights Watch, 36 W. 44th St., New York, NY 10036, or from the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 330 Seventh Ave., 10th floor north, New York, NY 10001.

CANADIAN HANDBOOK GUIDES REFUGEE SPONSORS

The Canadian Working Group on Refugee Resettlement has produced the Refugee Sponsorship Handbook, a practical guide for groups planning to sponsor a refugee.

The handbook outlines the types of sponsorships available in Canada and provides guidance on the costs and commitments associated with a decision to sponsor. It answers the short-term questions of the initial meeting with the refugee and defining of roles as well as long-term adjustment questions involving employment, language, and emotional well-being.

The handbook suggests formation of committees to oversee the refugees' financial, housing, language, job, health, clothing, furnishings, and food needs.

The Refugee Sponsorship Handbook is available for $10, Canadian currency, plus $3.50 postage and handling in Canada, $4 in the United States, from the Working Group on Refugee Resettlement, 347 College St., Suite 301, Toronto, Ont. M5T 2V8, Canada.

NEWSLETTER KEEPS TABS ON GUATEMALA

A Midwest regional newsletter of the Organization in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala has been focusing recently on the status of Guatemalan refugees.

The lead story in the Fall-Winter 1987-8 issue gives an overview of repatriation efforts since late 1986. Included are texts of refugee letters to President Cerezo on conditions that need to met before refugees will feel secure enough to return, petitions from the Guatemalan Episcopal Conference, and accounts of specific incidents of harassment of returnees.

For more information about the OSGUA Newsletter, write to P.O. Box 25333, Chicago, IL 60625, or call (312) 276-2425.

**SALVADORAN ARRIVALS IN THE UNITED STATES:
A COMPARISON BY PERCENTAGE OF THOSE ARRIVALS WHO HAD BEEN DISPLACED
OR NOT DISPLACED IN EL SALVADOR
1941-1987**

(This chart is adapted from "Salvadoran Migration to the United States: An Exploratory Study," by Segundo Montes Mozo and Juan Jose Garcia Vasquez.)

Time Period	Percent of Total Emigrants	Percent Displaced in El Salvador	Percent Not Displaced in El Salvador
1941-1976	16.7%	4.7%	20.0%
1977-1978	6.0%	4.7%	6.4%
1979-1981	28.5%	24.6%	28.0%
1982-1987	48.8%	66.0%	45.5%
	100%	100%	100%

EDITOR'S NOTE: This chart is intended to be read vertically, not horizontally. For example, 48.8% of all Salvadoran arrivals to the United States entered between 1982 and 1987. Of all Salvadorans who entered the United States after first having been displaced in El Salvador, 66% did so during the period 1982-1987. By the same token, 45.5% of all Salvadorans who were not originally displaced in El Salvador entered the United States during that period.

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